



The Honorable Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

“If there is nothing else I do to make some little impact on moving us toward the public financing of elections, I would consider my stint in the Senate a success.” -- Joe Biden 1973

“If you want to change overnight, instantaneously, the electoral process in America and the way we handle issues, have public financing.” – Joe Biden 2016

May 11, 2021

Dear Senators Schumer, Merkley and Klobuchar:

As members of Congress from states where citizen financing of elections has been enacted – either statewide or at the local level – we congratulate you on the small donor matching system included in S.1, the For the People Act. As you know, this innovative approach to financing Congressional campaigns was also an integral component of H.R. 1, the companion bill to S. 1, which passed the House of Representatives on March 3rd.

In addition to the essential protections provided for the sacred right to vote, there are numerous reforms in HR1/S1 that can help everyday Americans push back on a corrupt political system, including ethics and lobbying reforms, a fix to the broken Federal Election Commission and reforms to ensure secret money being spent in elections is disclosed.

But, in particular, the small donor matching system will wrest control away from the big money players in Washington and empower a new set of voices. Studies show that variously designed small donor systems can increase racial, gender and socio-economic diversity in the candidate pool by promoting access for those who lack connections to the high-end donor class. Furthermore, by reducing candidate dependence on PACs and wealthy contributors, this system allows elected lawmakers to break free from the influence of moneyed special interests and keep their focus on the interests of their constituents.

James Madison cautioned that government should be dependent upon the people alone.

An important feature of the system created under HR1/S1 is that it does not use any taxpayer revenues. Instead, the system is fully funded by a surcharge on fees, penalties and settlements paid to the government by corporate lawbreakers and wealthy tax cheats. Purdue Pharma, for example, would pay for fueling the opioid addiction crisis.

We note that Congressman John Lewis – whose legacy is at the center of the current voting rights battles waged in Georgia and around the country – was a fierce advocate of both the voting reforms and the campaign finance reforms contained in the For the People Act. On the topic of money in politics, he was emphatic:

“There is too much money in politics. Political candidates should not be up for sale to the highest bidder. Too many of us spend too much of our time dialing for dollars. We should not be elected this way. This should not be the essence of our democracy. I did not march across the bridge at Selma on March 7, 1965, and almost lose my life to become part of a political system so corrupt that it pollutes the very idea of what we marched for. That is not why President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.”

It is no surprise that Congressman Lewis repeatedly co-sponsored legislation to establish a small donor financing system for federal campaigns, in addition to sponsoring his own Voter Empowerment Act. He understood, as we do, that democratizing the funding of campaigns will empower everyday Americans so that, when it comes to public policy, their interests are not overridden by influence-seeking funders.

We are attaching two reports from the Brennan Center for Justice: [“Faces of Small Donor Public Financing 2021”](#) and [“Small Donor Public Financing Could Advance Race and Gender Equity in Congress.”](#)

Along with the other critical reforms in the For the People Act, a new system of citizen-owned elections can chart a course towards a more inclusive and accountable democracy – the kind of democracy that John Lewis fought for every day of his life.

We look forward to partnering with you to secure passage of this transformational legislation.

Respectfully,

/s/
JOHN B. LARSON (CT)
Member of Congress

/s/
CHELLIE PINGREE (ME)
Member of Congress

/s/
MONDAIRE JONES (NY)
Member of Congress

/s/
KAREN BASS (CA)
Member of Congress

/s/
EARL BLUMENAUER (OR)
Member of Congress

/s/
SUZANNE BONAMICI (OR)
Member of Congress

/s/
JAMAAL BOWMAN (NY)
Member of Congress

/s/
ED CASE (HI)
Member of Congress

/s/
YVETTE CLARKE (NY)
Member of Congress

/s/
JOE COURTNEY (CT)
Member of Congress

/s/
JASON CROW (CO)
Member of Congress

/s/
DIANA DEGETTE (CO)
Member of Congress

/s/
ROSA DELAURO (CT)
Member of Congress

/s/
MARK DESAULNIER (CA)
Member of Congress

/s/
ADRIANO ESPAILLAT (NY)
Member of Congress

/s/
RUBEN GALLEGU (AZ)
Member of Congress

/s/
JIMMY GOMEZ (CA)
Member of Congress

/s/
PRAMILA JAYAPAL (WA)
Member of Congress

/s/
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TERESA LEGER FERNANDEZ (NM)
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ALAN LOWENTHAL (CA)
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BETTY MCCOLLUM (MN)
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/s/
GRACE MENG (NY)
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/s/
KWEISI MFUME (MD)
Member of Congress

/s/
JOE NEGUSE (CO)
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/s/
ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ (NY)
Member of Congress

/s/
ED PERLMUTTER (CO)
Member of Congress

/s/
JAMIE RASKIN (MD)
Member of Congress

/s/
DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER (MD)
Member of Congress

/s/
JOHN SARBANES (MD)
Member of Congress

Attachments:
[Brennan Center reports]